Plan Einstein Continuity Plan
City of Utrecht

August 2026



Supported by the URBACT programme

Plan Einstein Academy
Innovation Transfer Network

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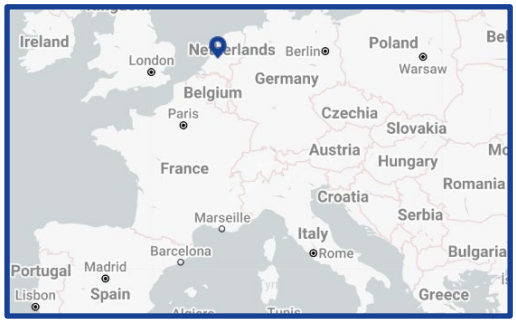
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1. Context

This document is the 'Continuity Plan' of the City of Utrecht setting out how it will further consolidate and scale up implementation of the 'Plan Einstein' concept first developed under an ERDF supported Urban Innovative Action 2016-2019 (see below).

The Plan is the main city-level output of Utrecht from its participation as Lead Partner in the URBACT Innovation Transfer Network 'Plan Einstein Academy' (see Methodology).

1.1. Utrecht city profile



Utrecht is the fourth-largest in the Netherlands, with a population of around 360,000. Located in the centre of mainland Netherlands, the city is part of the larger Randstad conurbation that also includes Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague. Due to its central position within the country, it is an important transport hub with the busiest railway station in the country and only 30 minutes from Schiphol airport.

Utrecht is a university town – home to one of the largest universities in the Netherlands – and known for its large student population of more than 70,000. This gives the city a relatively young population and the most highly educated workforce in the country with a well-developed knowledge-based economy.



The historic city centre of Utrecht is characterised by canals, wharfs, narrow streets and many buildings and structures dating back as far as the High Middle Ages, including its famous Dom Tower. Utrecht has a rich culture, with many national and international festivals. It is also a biking city, characterised by a large number of cyclists and bike paths.

The qualities of the city and its surroundings make Utrecht a good environment for residents, businesses and visitors. In recent decades, Utrecht has been the fastest growing large city in the Netherlands with its population forecast to reach 450,000 by 2040. However, this trend is also creating significant pressures on space, housing and mobility.

To address some of its urban challenges, Utrecht has participated in previous URBACT networks, including URGE, focused on introducing circular economy principles into the construction sector, and Tourism-Friendly Cities exploring more sustainable forms of tourism.

1.2. Background to 'Plan Einstein'

Utrecht has had an asylum centre (accommodation) in the city since 1993. This first facility was located in a former military hospital (located at Haydnlaan) and operated along quite traditional lines. There was limited contact between migrants and locals in the neighbourhood. At the same time, there were relatively few issues and little impetus to change things.

However, in 2015, Utrecht – like many cities across Europe – was faced with a steep rise in numbers of new arrivals due to the fast escalation of the situation in Syria. At one point, city officials were

told that buses would be arriving within two days with 500 refugees that needed housing. The only solutions the city could offer were temporary accommodation (reception) facilities based on traditional models and surrounded by fences for 'security' – whether of new arrivals, locals or both.

Reception policy in the Netherlands is managed by the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) and has long been to locate most reception centres in fenced-off sites outside of cities, such as in former military camps. Under this policy, a typical asylum seeker is moved five times between different reception facilities while they wait for their application to be reviewed.

However, experience showed that these existing models isolated new arrivals from local communities, creating distance and often distrust between them. This failure was creating long-term problems for city neighbourhoods where resentment was building, integration was slow and the well-being of the refugees negatively affected as they were effectively 'held in limbo' often for more than a year as they waited for their asylum claim to be reviewed.

Confronted by the urgency of the 2015 situation, aware that current policies were creating long-term local problems and conscious that this wave of migrants was unlikely to be the last, high-ranking city officials argued that another approach was needed.

Local officials at the City of Utrecht, Niene Oepkes and Jan Braat, started to create the idea of Plan Einstein based on a completely new way of imagining the way that migrants and asylum seekers were received. The central idea was to put the reception centre at the heart of a city community, offering a more stable space in which contact with the host community would be encouraged to build relations with locals and foster inclusion.

1.3. The Urban Innovative Action, 2016-2019

As their ideas took shape, the timing was perfect to apply for funding under Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) to test their innovative ideas. A successful application for funding was submitted – together with new partners, such as the Entrepreneurship Department of the University of Utrecht – under the name **Utrecht Refugee Launchpad**.

The project aimed to house asylum seekers alongside local young people also in need of housing solutions and to provide activities and opportunities for people to live together, learn together, work together. Key aims were: social connections and good local relations; improved future-proof skills and labour market activation; and better wellbeing for all.

Utrecht received nearly EUR 2.8 million in UIA funding (European Regional Development Fund) for the project which ran for three years from November 2016 to October 2019. The first location was a pair of former office buildings located on 'Einsteindreef' in the relatively deprived Utrecht neighbourhood of Overvecht.

One of the buildings was developed by the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) as the refugee reception centre (accommodation). Under the project, the second building was converted by Socius housing company into 38 residential rooms for local young people as well as classrooms and an incubator space. The local young tenants had diverse profiles, though united in having a warm link with the neighbourhood population by birth, family or social network. Their rent was discounted by 10% in exchange for a commitment to be involved in activities in the project.

The accommodation for refugees and local youngsters had a shared courtyard which was also improved so that outdoor activities and events could take place. There was also an open welcoming space, open to asylum seekers and locals alike.

Alongside, a range of activities were organised aimed at both asylum seekers and locals. These included training courses in English, entrepreneurship and business incubation. It also included less formal activities, such as eating together and Dutch-language tutoring, which were mostly organised by partner organisations or tenants themselves. Some of these were regular planned activities, whilst others were more spontaneous and ad hoc.

The development of the project was not without its challenges. Many local residents initially opposed the development of a new migrant reception facility in their neighbourhood. The process of getting the centre ready to open saw protests on the streets and the need for police intervention. To help the project go ahead, the deputy mayor promised that it would be only a temporary facility.



Keeping the deputy mayor's promise meant that the centre in Overvecht had to be closed when the three years of the original lease ended in November 2018. However, the pilot had already demonstrated its success during a two-year implementation period.

During its two years of operation, the reception facility took in 558 refugees and the courses proved a very successful way to bring asylum seekers and local people together on an equal footing. In addition, 65 one-off social activities took place in the two years bringing together new arrivals and established residents (with about one third involving people from the surrounding neighbourhood).



Many of these were coordinated by associations, but others were more spontaneous and bottom up reflecting the hopes of the project that interactions would be increasingly natural and spontaneous.

Even more significantly than these numbers, local attitudes towards the centre had significantly improved. In a striking development, many locals who were initially opposed to the opening of the original centre now wanted it to remain open.

The concept demonstrated by the UIA project also had a new name by the end to better capture the essence that the approach was for everybody. Since the original site was at Einsteindreef, Einstein was a famous genius, but also a famous refugee, **the new name came naturally: Plan Einstein**.

1.4. Building on the original project's successes, 2019-2024

Plan Einstein Haydn

Despite the closure of the pilot centre supported under UIA, the project's successes convinced the City of Utrecht to reallocate municipal budget to transfer the newly named 'Plan Einstein' concept to the main refugee centre at Haydnlaan (in another neighbourhood of Utrecht). This centre had been operating along quite traditional lines since the 1990s and was accommodating over 550 asylum seekers.

It was not possible to introduce a co-housing element to the existing infrastructure, so implementation focused on delivering an attractive, open space and activities for meaningful encounters between asylum seekers and local residents in a loft space in a neighbouring building. The new location was called 'Plan Einstein Haydn'.

The space was designed to be as welcoming as possible, including being attractive and colourful, with motifs from different cultures. The creation of the space was supported by the organisation of diverse activities to turn it into an active and used community resource.



Activities include IT/computer classes, language café sessions, Dutch and English classes, mental health support sessions, and activities for mothers and children.



Plan Einstein as local policy

Even more positively for the long-term continuity of the concept, in 2019, **Plan Einstein was adopted as local policy for the reception and inclusion of migrants**. The vote was passed by unanimity – including parties at all ends of the political spectrum. This has meant that the reception of asylum seekers in Utrecht – even under national policy – should respect Plan Einstein principles for the benefit of new arrivals and neighbourhood members.

On this basis, the Municipality has continued to roll out Plan Einstein locations within the city, each of which have demonstrated different applications according to the specific neighbourhood context.

Plan Einstein Pahud

In 2023, negotiations between the municipality and the national reception agency (COA) came to an agreement that until the end of 2025 the Municipality would get €800K a year for Plan Einstein. On this basis, the creation of a new reception facility with a co-housing component following Plan Einstein principles was agreed.



'Plan Einstein Pahud' was developed for 300 asylum seekers and co-housing for 30 local young people. The co-housing was co-financed by the rent paid by the youngsters every month.

While the accommodation for the local young people and the asylum seekers are in separate blocks, they are on the same site and benefit from several shared facilities, including shared outdoor facilities such as playground equipment for children and picnic tables to sit and eat or play games and talk.



There are also shared indoor facilities including a ground-floor 'open welcoming space' where people can drop in for a drink and to socialise and where social events are sometimes organised.

There are also separate smaller meeting rooms, which can be used as classrooms or workshops for diverse activities.

A key part of the implementation of the Plan Einstein approach here are personal development activities, including business and entrepreneurship courses as well as CV building courses, language courses and job coaching.

There are also a range of psychosocial support activities, such as 'Mindfit' meetings organised by the Refugee Council where refugees can talk in a safe environment about psychological and other issues they are facing. Activities aim to support self-narrative restoration for those affected by trauma.

As part of the range of activities organised through the shared space, there are a lot of sports activities like football, art activities, dance evenings, sewing courses and cooking together with the neighbourhood. Specific activities are organised for children, including kids' games, creative activities and sport.

Plan Einstein Hercules

May 2025 saw the introduction of a new open welcoming space and activities for meaningful encounters focused on refugees from the war in Ukraine. The centre is located at 'Herculesplein' - in a neighbourhood where lots of Ukrainian refugees are already housed.

The centre is open to all neighbourhood members and Ukrainian refugees wherever they are living in the city. There is no co-housing element, but plenty of joint activities, both formal and informal. The space is in a relatively gentrified neighbourhood where numerous volunteers have been engaged.

The free open space and programme of activities is paid out of the budget of the Ukraine programme with support from the national government and the municipality of Utrecht who co-organise it with NGOs, including Vitalya – a self-organised association of Ukrainian refugees.

Several activities are organised to foster meaningful connections between refugees and neighbourhood members, including making music together, cooking together and Dutch language cafes. Another activity is called "meet the neighbours" to have more contacts between Ukrainian and Dutch people and aim to open up the activities increasingly to Utrecht citizens.

Other activities open to all include a chess club, acupuncture and English conversation courses, as well as play activities for children.



Biltsestraatweg/ Star lodge

On the Biltsestraatweg is the Star Lodge - a temporary location opened in May 2021 for reception of now 335 asylum seekers, which increasingly integrates Plan Einstein principles within the specifics of its own local reality.

Because of lack of space, there is only a very small open, welcoming space for all. Nevertheless, there are diverse activities organised in the space to bring people together, including circus classes with clowns and playing volleyball together.

Several activities are specifically targeted at women and children. There are various kids club activities including gaming and children's movies. There are also activities designed to create safe spaces for women, including sewing activities and a women's café.



Plan Einstein hubs

Utrecht is increasingly working with independent centres of activity outside (but mostly nearby) the main Plain Einstein locations. Known as 'Plan Einstein hubs', they are established in partnership with other groups who control the physical spaces and can host relevant activities aligned with the principles of Plan Einstein – building on the idea of the **Plan Einstein ecosystem approach** – not everything has to take place in the 'central' locations.

For example, Plan Einstein Haydn is increasingly supported by a number of open and accessible activity 'hubs' within walking distance of Haydnlaan. This includes personal development activities such as 'Build Your Own Future' entrepreneurship courses, and targeted 'Women in Business' courses, as well as jobs skills training with job coaches. Diverse socio-cultural activities in hub locations include drawing classes, workshops on topics from dancing to massage, a kids club for those aged 4-12, and skateboarding activities for older children.

Many Ukrainian people from the Ukrainian reception centres near Plan Einstein Hercules also follow more advanced English courses at the Plan Einstein Haydn and Pahud locations.

Also, in the neighbourhood of Star Lodge, many of the activities organised to implement Plan Einstein principles take place in nearby 'hubs'. For example, a community gardening activity organised nearby by the association 'Buitenkamer' (Outsideroom) and 'cooking in the neighbourhood' activities. Residents are also able to access English courses at Plan Einstein Pahud.

1.5. Ambitions for Plan Einstein Academy, 2024-2026 - and future continuity

The formal adoption of Plan Einstein as **official policy of the City of Utrecht** in 2020 was a key strategic step in securing the innovation's long-term continuity. Nevertheless, the allocation of municipal funding to support implementation of the Plan Einstein approach – and any connected funding agreement with the national 'Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers' (COA) – are **subject to regular budgetary (re-)negotiations**. This means the approach needs to be defended and advocated for in budgetary decision-making on a regular basis to ensure effective implementation of the policy.

Furthermore, implementation of the approach – in terms of specific activities and spaces – requires **continual evolution together with the local ecosystem** of actors engaged in delivering on the principles of Plan Einstein. It is not a prescribed set of actions which are set in stone from the beginning.

In this context, the City of Utrecht hoped that participating in the Plan Einstein Academy network would bring new energy and ideas to the **ongoing evolution and scaling up of the concept locally**. In particular, by reinvigorating local participatory processes through the activities of the URBACT Local Group, as well as enabling local activities to take new inspiration, lessons and ideas from the transfer partner cities (see Methodology below).

Beyond its own local context, taking on the role of Lead Partner in the Innovation Transfer Network was also an important part of Utrecht's **ambitions to spread the successful Plan Einstein concept** to more cities across Europe. Already, many cities had shown an interest and many had visited Utrecht to discover it for themselves and learn more about it. However, there was still a lack of successful examples of transfer to showcase and build momentum for further transfer.

The project provided an opportunity to **explore the opportunities and barriers to transfer** in different urban and political contexts and, hopefully, achieve transfer success as an example to others.

2. Plan Einstein Academy methodology

2.1. Network partnership

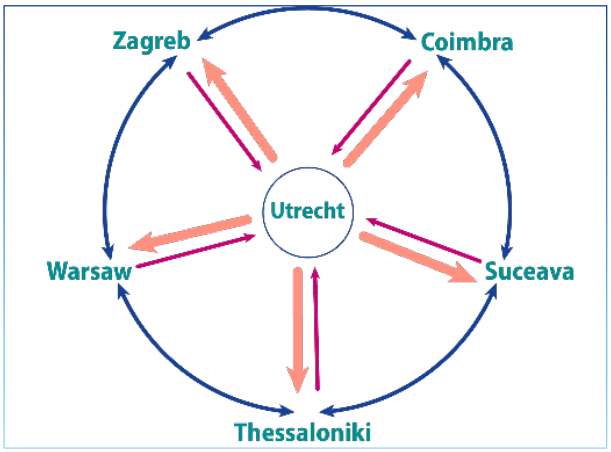
Plan Einstein Academy was a two-year URBACT network of six European cities that ran from September 2024 to August 2026.

Lead Partner

- Utrecht (Netherlands).

Transfer partners:

- Coimbra (Portugal)
- Suceava (Romania)
- Thessaloniki (Greece)
- Warsaw (Poland)
- Zagreb (Croatia)



The network is characterised by its diversity. This diversity is apparent in several aspects including: city size, geographic location, migrant profiles, local experiences of migrant reception and local policies towards migrant inclusion. This diversity aimed to create and enable unique combinations of possibilities, opportunities and preferences for transfer.

A core part of the knowledge exchange/transfer was from the innovative practice city of Utrecht to the partners. However, there is also the important principle that each partner has ideas, practices and approaches to share. The learning and exchange was also back to Utrecht and between each partner. The knowledge exchange model of Plan Einstein Academy is presented in the diagram above.

The knowledge exchange model looks something like a wheel, containing elements of a radial model – from Utrecht in the centre out – but also of a carousel model with knowledge passing all the way round and among the partnership. (Note that lines between all partners are implied.)

2.2. Network activities

The core activities of the network were the **URBACT Local Group (ULG) meetings in each partner city** and the **Transnational Exchange meetings** (both in-person and online) between all partners and **trilateral 'health checks'** (calls) with each partner, Lead Partner and Lead Expert.

These were supported by additional **ad hoc activities**, including online exchanges about the running of the local ULGs, and online workshops focused on key topics of interest to partners including funding of future activities and social enterprises.

Each partner committed to developing a local plan for the future implementation of Plan Einstein in their city. Meanwhile, at network level, activities focused on **sharing the lessons and messages** about the potential for transferring Plan Einstein to other cities – including through regular Network Journals, articles, a final network output and a network video: all available via the network webpage on the URBACT website: https://urbact.eu/networks/plan-einstein-academy.

2.3. URBACT Local Group in Utrecht

The URBACT Local Group was comprised of all the organisations cooperating with the City of Utrecht on Plan Einstein activities of different types. The profile and activities carried out by each ULG member are outlined in the following table.

Plan Einstein partners and their related activities

	Partner name partner	Most important activities within Plan Einstein
1	De Buitenkamer (the outside room)	Communal gardening, atelier
2	Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA)	Participation, Dutch language
3	University of applied sciences Utrecht	Cursus Developing your professional competencies and skills, monitoring and evaluation Plan Einstein
4	Utrecht Municipality	Programs Young adults and work
5	Marcellien's Good Company/ Oscar van der Ende Business Training & Advisory Services	Courses Build your own Future, Discover your Business, Women Empower
6	New Dutch Connections	Program Future Citizens, cooking , Low thresholds evenings, digital Skills, The future academy
7	The Social Collective	Neighbourhood activities in Utrecht neighbourhood Overvecht
8	Social Impact Factory	Courses Explore your Future, Shape your future to Work
9	STUT Theatre	Theatre practices, Radio Einstein (podcast)
10	Stichting Tijdelijk Wonen (temporary housing)	Housing and community living
11	Volksuniversiteit People university	English lessons from starter till Cambridge English
12	De Voorkamer The frontroom	Language cafe's, Women evening, Party and movies evenings, Migrant tours
13	Vluchtelingenwerk West en Midden-Nederland Refugee counsil	Intakes, training Mindfit, Courses good parenthood
14	Welkom in Utrecht Welcome in Utrecht	In charge of good atmosphere in the free open spaces Voluntary activities on cooking, sports, music, knitting, party evenings, women mornings, children activities, language café, excursions,
15	Het Wilde Westen The Wild West	Music, dance, Cooking, sowing atelier

16	Swimpact Swimpact	Learning (adult) refugees to swim for Dutch swim degrees
17	U On Board Longboarden voor kwetsbare jongeren in Utrecht | Hogeschool Utrecht	Skateboarden voor young refugees and youngsters from the neighbourhood.
18	Bike flip Frequently Asked Questions - BikeFlip	Learning refugees to cycle and to get the skills to work in a bicycle shop and repair bicycles
19	Justice and Peace Justice & Peace - Empowerment-actie voor sociale rechtvaardigheid	Meeting refugees and local people from the neighbourhood
20	Young grass Sportsbuddies JongGras Sportbuddy's | Academie van de Stad	Guiding young refugees with a student buddy to a member of an Utrecht Sportsclub
21	Buddy to buddy Utrecht - Buddy to Buddy	Pairing Student buddies with refugees to do fun things in the city and learning the city.

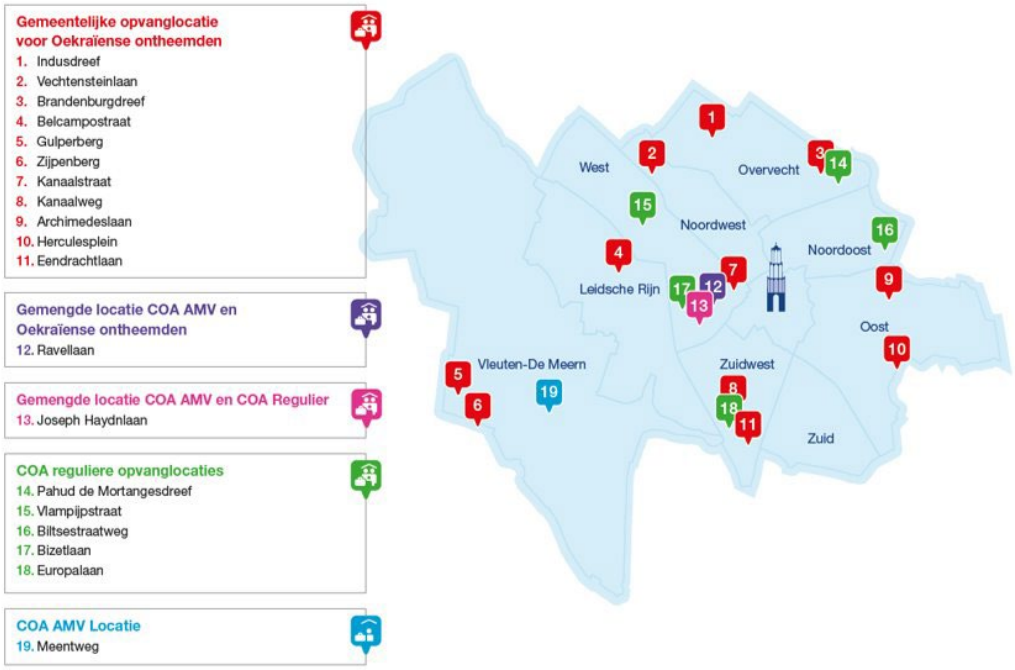
2.4. Local vision for the Continuity Plan

The core local vision for the continuation of Plan Einstein in Utrecht defined by the URBACT Local Group is that:

Plan Einstein gives people the space and opportunity to work towards a new future (including employment) from the moment of arrival, even if that future is not in the Netherlands.

This vision is already taking shape and needs to be strengthened and continued. The map below shows the current location of migrant reception facilities across Utrecht. This provides a clear starting point for continuing to roll out the Plan Einstein approach in more locations – as well as consolidating and maintaining existing Plan Einstein locations and activities.

Map of migrant reception facilities in Utrecht



- The 11 pins in red are municipal reception centres specifically for the reception of Ukrainian refugees (with 1636 residents as of 2025)
- The 1 pin in purple is a mixed COA reception centre for Ukrainian refugees and unaccompanied minors.
- The 1 pin in pink and 5 pins in green are regular COA reception centres (with 1705 residents as of 2025) - the pink pin is different because it also receives unaccompanied minors.
- The 1 pin blue is a dedicated COA reception centre for unaccompanied minors

At the beginning of the project in 2024, the existing Plan Einstein locations on this map were:

1. No. 13 Plan Einstein Haydn – open welcoming space in building next to the reception centre
2. No.14 Plan Einstein Pahud – co-housing solution and open, welcoming space on one site.
3. No. 10 Plan Einstein Hercules – open, welcoming space for Ukrainian refugees in Utrecht
4. No. 16 Biltsestraatweg/ Star lodge – now includes a small open welcoming space.

As mentioned above, these Plan Einstein locations are supported by numerous external 'Plan Einstein hubs' (not shown on map) which offer additional appropriate spaces and activities for meaningful encounters as part of the overall ecosystem approach.

3. Local intervention logic

Vision for the continuity of Plan Einstein in Utrecht:

Plan Einstein gives people the space and opportunity to work towards a new future (including employment) from the moment of arrival, even if that future is not in the Netherlands.

To deliver on this vision and put the principles of Plan Einstein into practice in our city, we seek to achieve **objectives defined under six headings**: including three complementary domains of action and three cross-cutting approaches, as set out below:

A. Complementary domains of action	**1.** Providing appropriate **spaces for encounters**	**2. Build social networks**	**3.** Supporting **personal development** and building a future
B. Cross-cutting approaches	**4.** Consolidating an **ecosystem approach** to local social cohesion		
	5. Consolidating the position of Plan Einstein in official local policy through effective **monitoring and evaluation**		
	6. Delivering **co-housing solutions** for local people and newcomers where possible		

4. Plan of Action

4.1. Summary action tables

Actions are defined under each of our six objectives to deliver on the local vision.

Objective 1.	Providing appropriate **spaces for encounters**

Sub-objective 1.1: **Maintaining existing Plan Einstein spaces** for meaningful encounters							
Description: Maintenance of open, welcome spaces for meaningful encounters between newcomers and neighbourhood members – particularly, but not exclusively established within or alongside existing reception centres for asylum seekers.							
Action name	**Description**	**Asylum Reception Capacity**	**Co-housing**	**Welcoming Space Opened**	**Funding**	**Operator**	
						Current	**2027-2028**
1.1. Plan Einstein Haydnlaan	Maintain open, welcoming space in attic location alongside asylum centre at Haydnlaan	590 people	No	2020	Municipality + COA	Welkom in Utrecht	Decided by 2026 Call for Tender
1.2. Plan Einstein Pahud	Maintain ground-floor open, welcoming space as part of the co-housing complex at Pahud de Mortangesdreef (*see Action 6.1*)	300 people	30 local young people	2023	Municipality + COA		
1.3. Plan Einstein Hercules	Maintain open, welcoming space with a focus on Ukrainian refugees at Herculesplein.	300 people	No	2024	National Ukraine programme		
1.4. Plan Einstein Biltsestraatweg	Maintain small open welcoming space at asylum centre at Biltsestraatweg	350 people	No	2025	Municipality + COA		
1.5. De Voorkamer (Plan Einstein Hub)	Maintain the 'Frontroom' open welcoming space on Kanaalstraat in the city as a 'Plan Einstein hub'	n/a	No	2017	De Voorkamer + Municipality	De Voorkamer	

Sub-objective 1.2: **Creating new Plan Einstein spaces** for meaningful encounters							
Description: Creation of new open, welcome spaces for meaningful encounters between newcomers and neighbourhood members within or alongside existing or new reception centres for asylum seekers.							
Action name	**Description**	**Asylum Reception Capacity**	**Co-housing**	**Welcoming Space to Open**	**Funding**	**Operator**	
						Current	**2027-2028**
1.6. Plan Einstein Vlampijpstraat	Create a new welcoming space on the ground floor of a recently established reception centre	220 people	No	2025	Municipality + COA	Welkom in Utrecht	Decided by 2026 Call for Tender
1.7. Plan Einstein Europalaan	Create a new welcoming space on the ground floor of a recently opened asylum centre for women and children only. The refurbished entre will be for regular asylum seekers and include the new open, welcoming space.	385 people by 2028	No	2026	Municipality + COA		
1.8. Continue roll out of open welcoming spaces	Gradual creation of new open welcoming spaces within all new or existing reception centres in Utrecht on an ongoing basis.	tbc	tbc	2027+	Likely Municipality + COA with creative solutions as required.	n/a	tbc

<table>
<tr><td colspan="4">Objective 2. Delivering activities to help build social networks</td></tr>
<tr><td>Description:</td><td colspan="3">The City of Utrecht will support local organisations and associations to deliver a diverse range of low-threshold activities designed to enable newcomers to enjoy meaningful encounters and build their social networks including with members of the local neighbourhood.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Funding</td><td colspan="3">Subsidies will be offered to eligible organisations from the Municipal Plan Einstein programme on the basis of an open call for activities.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Timeframe</td><td colspan="3">The call will be launched in mid-2026 for a two-year funding period 2027-2028.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Eligible organisations</td><td colspan="3">a. a legal entity with full legal capacity;
b. a legal entity with limited legal capacity
c. a natural person with a business registered in the Trade Register of the Chamber of Commerce
d. an alliance.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="8">Selection criteria</td><td></td><td>Criterion</td><td>Max. points</td></tr>
<tr><td>1.1</td><td>Activities contribute to the goals and objectives of Plan Einstein and the Pillars</td><td>15</td></tr>
<tr><td>1.2</td><td>Need/necessity of the proposed activities</td><td>15</td></tr>
<tr><td>2</td><td>Approach of the applicant to its role within the Plan Einstein ecosystem</td><td>10</td></tr>
<tr><td>3</td><td>Connections between residents of the asylum seekers' centre and local residents</td><td>15</td></tr>
<tr><td>4</td><td>Feasibility and practicability for application in the short-term</td><td>10</td></tr>
<tr><td>5</td><td>Cultural sensitivity/inclusivity of the proposed activities</td><td>10</td></tr>
<tr><td>6</td><td>Demonstrable experience of the applicant</td><td>15</td></tr>
<tr><td>7</td><td>Commitment and approach to continuous learning and adaptability</td><td>10</td></tr>
<tr><td>Illustrative activities</td><td colspan="3">Example activities that could be offered under this strand include arts and culture activities (e.g. multicultural choir, theatre performance, group visits to museums, drawing classes, music workshops, sewing groups); leisure activities (e.g. sports activities, walking togethers, dancing classes, chess club); food-based activities (e.g. ‘cooking in the neighbourhood’, eating together, community gardening) and ad hoc social activities (e.g. ‘meet the neighbours’ activities, social gatherings and women’s cafes).</td></tr>
</table>

Objective 3.	Supporting **personal development** and building a future		
Description:	The City of Utrecht will support local organisations and associations to deliver a diverse range of low-threshold activities designed to help beneficiaries to develop their skills, expand their professional networks and improve opportunities in the labour market.		
Funding	Subsidies will be offered to eligible organisations from the Municipal Plan Einstein programme on the basis of an open call for activities.		
Timeframe	The call will be launched in mid-2026 for a two-year funding period 2027-2028.		
Eligible organisations	a. a legal entity with full legal capacity; b. a legal entity with limited legal capacity c. a natural person with a business registered in the Trade Register of the Chamber of Commerce d. an alliance.		
Selection criteria		**Criterion**	**Max. points**
	1.1	Activities contribute to the goals and objectives of Plan Einstein and the Pillars	15
	1.2	Need/necessity of the proposed activities	15
	1.3	Relationship between the amount of the requested subsidy and the expected result.	10
	2	Approach of the applicant to its role within the Plan Einstein ecosystem	10
	3	Connections between residents of the asylum seekers' centre and local residents	10
	4	Feasibility and practicability for application in the short-term	10
	5	Cultural sensitivity/inclusivity of the proposed activities	10
	6	Demonstrable experience of the applicant	10
	7	Commitment and approach to continuous learning and adaptability	10
Illustrative activities	Example activities that could be proposed under this strand include: **language courses** (e.g. English or Dutch classes); **business skills training** (e.g. women in business courses, 'Build Your Own Future' entrepreneurship courses; and **coaching and mentoring** (e.g. CV building courses and trajectories with job coaches to learn hard and soft skills for employment)		

Objective 4. To consolidate the **ecosystem approach** to local social cohesion						
Description: activities designed to strengthen the ecosystem approach by improving coordination, collaboration and a sense of community among actors involved in managing welcoming spaces and/or delivering activities aimed at either building social networks or personal development.						
Action name	**Description**	**Output indicator**	**Action Lead**	**Participants**	**Funding**	**Timing**
4.1. Steering Group	Regular coordination meetings of a small stakeholder group (ULG legacy) to oversee and coordinate ongoing activities.	12 meetings per year	Municipality	Welcome in Utrecht, University of Applied Sciences, Refugee Council, 'Marcelien Good company'.	Municipal Plan Einstein programme	2026+
4.2. Innovation Group	Regular meetings of a select group to reflect strategically on impact, evolving needs and new ideas.	2 meetings per year	Municipality	ULG coordinator, Utrecht University, University of Applied Sciences	Municipal Plan Einstein programme	2026+
4.3. Ecosystem Meetings	Coordination meeting with all partners in the Plan Einstein system to review approaches, successes, lessons and evolving needs.	2 meetings per year	Municipality	All Plan Einstein partners and service providers.	Municipal Plan Einstein programme	2026+
4.4. Open call for Plan Einstein activities	An open call for activities (see Objectives 2&3 above) seeks to empower actors within the ecosystem to both identify needs and define suitable local responses.	1 open call for activities	Municipality	All current and potential actors in the Plan Einstein ecosystem	Municipal Plan Einstein programme	2026
4.5. Communication and information	Raising awareness of and promoting the Plan Einstein philosophy and approach and its positive impact	Published and online materials	Municipality	Delivery partners	Municipal Plan Einstein programme	2026+
4.6. 10-year Anniversary celebrations	Evening of activities to celebrate and recognise the contributions of all those involved in 10 years of Plan Einstein.	300+ guests	Municipality	Refugees, founding mothers and fathers, NGOs, associations, politicians, civil servants.	Municipal Plan Einstein programme	30 October 2026

Objective 5.	Consolidating the position of Plan Einstein in official local policy through effective **monitoring and evaluation**

Description: Since Plan Einstein is already established as official policy of the City of Utrecht, the actions foreseen under this objective are focused on demonstrating the positive impact of Plan Einstein as a local policy, both in the short-term and over time. The foreseen actions set out briefly here are ***set out in more detail in the Sections 5.5 "Regular Monitoring Framework" and 5.6 "Long-term impact assessment" below***.

Action name	Description	Output indicator	Action Lead	Key partners	Funding	Timing
5.1. Regular monitoring	Review, analysis and recommendations based on the quantitative and qualitative data collected on an ongoing basis by the on-the-ground delivery partners (*See Section 5.5. Regular Monitoring Framework*).	2 monitoring reports per year	University of Applied Sciences	All Plan Einstein partners for input	Municipality Plan Einstein programme.	Ongoing
5.2. Long-term impact assessment	First ever detailed investigation on the key research question: "Do Plan Einstein participants differ from other (comparable) refugees in terms of socio-economic position and well-being after ten years of Plan Einstein?" (*See Section 5.6 Long-term Impact Assessment*)	Research Final Report	Municipality Research Department & Niene Oepkes (external expert)	National Central Bureau of Statistics	Municipality Plan Einstein programme.	2026-2027

Objective 6.	Delivering **co-housing solutions** for local people and newcomers where possible.

Description: In line with the original UIA Innovative Action, the roll-out of Plan Einstein across the city of Utrecht aims to meet the need of both local and newcomers for accessible housing solutions wherever possible in ways that encourage meaningful encounters and support social cohesion. Although practical realities often mean that the introduction of a co-housing element to a reception centre is not feasible, the Continuity Plan still includes an important strand that seeks to continue seeking opportunities for such developments in the future.

Action name	Description	Output Target	Action Lead	Key partners	Funding	Timing
6 1. Plan Einstein Pahud	Maintain the co-housing facility location at Pahud de Mortangesdreef for as long as possible (*see also action 1.2 on the open, welcoming space within the same complex*)	Co-housing for 30 Utrecht young adults and 300 asylum seekers	Municipality	COA	Supported under current financial agreement with COA (see funding strategy)	Until 2028
6 2. New co-housing solutions	Establishment of a new structural reception centre with co-housing	tbc	Temporary housing company	COA, Municipality	The intention is that the rent contributions will cover the costs of the co-housing solution.	2028
6 3. Explore further co-housing possibilities	Investigate possibility of co-housing solution in every new reception centre in Utrecht	tbc	Municipality	COA, temporary housing company	Under financial agreement with COA + creative solutions e.g. rent contributions	Ongoing

5. Implementation Framework

5.1. Strategic approach to implementation

The overall approach to implementation is defined by some key and inter-related strategic choices:

a. The ecosystem approach to delivery

The ecosystem approach is at the heart of the approach to implementation of Utrecht's Continuity Plan for Plan Einstein (see the actions foreseen under Objective 4 above). It is not the Municipality itself that sees itself as best placed to deliver all the local and community-based activities that are necessary to implement Plan Einstein principles. Central to the overall approach is cooperation with an ecosystem of organisations and stakeholders that can each play their role in delivering welcoming spaces or inclusive activities at the grassroots level.

Utrecht already has an established network of actors involved in the Plan Einstein ecosystem – see the members of the URBACT Local Group in Section 2.3 above). Equally, this is not a closed group, and opportunities are continually provided for new organisations to take part in delivering the philosophy of Plan Einstein through ongoing dissemination and awareness-raising about the added value of open and inclusive approaches as well as through an open call for Plan Einstein activities.

b. Empowering community actors to identify and respond to needs

The ecosystem of actors are not only delivery partners. The desired activities themselves are not defined through a central planning committee or by the Municipality itself. Rather, local actors are empowered to identify needs themselves and propose the activities they feel will best respond to those needs. An open call for activities launched by the Municipality seeks to identify and subsidise community actors who can propose local activities to deliver Plan Einstein principles in different neighbourhoods of the city. Applicant organisations have to not only demonstrate that they have an understanding of existing community needs in the neighbourhoods where they want to implement their activities, but also that they are willing to learn and adapt to changing circumstances and evolving needs over time.

Plan Einstein Implementation through a Call for Tender

To support the activities of the Plan Einstein ecosystem, the City of Utrecht published a call for tender in 2026. Within this, the Municipality established 4 categories of sub tender:

1. A tender for the free open spaces for meaningful encounters for 3 years (2027-2029)
2. A tender for activities on meeting each other and building a social network refugees and people from the neighbourhood. This tender was for 2 years (2027-2028)
3. A tender for personal development for refugees and people from the neighbourhood for 2 years. (2027-2028)
4. A tender for (innovative) and more small-scale activities on social networking and personal development for 1 year (2027)

Members of the ecosystem were free to propose appropriate activities that meet the principles of Plan Einstein, but building on their own understanding of local needs – empowering them to design as well as delivery appropriate activities.

The result is expected to be a mix of new and already existing activities for meeting the needs of refugees and people from the neighbourhood.

c. Collaboration with the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA)

The Municipality seeks to continually engage constructively with the national agency in recognising and investing in the benefits of the Plan Einstein approach when planning the reception of asylum seekers in Utrecht. This requires regular negotiation of new centres and funding frameworks to ensure that Utrecht can deliver the principles defined by local policy when delivering reception centres. The collaboration with COA is a key strategic relationship.

d. Diversified funding

The Municipality is continually seeking ways to diversify the funding of Plan Einstein-type activities in the city. This seeks to build on the opportunities offered by the Municipal budget allocated to the municipal Plan Einstein programme and the contribution agreed with the national reception agency (COA), to enable increasing scaling up of activities through European projects and other potential innovative financial mechanisms (see 5.3. Funding Strategy below).

5.2. Future Governance

The Continuity Plans makes clear provisions for the ongoing governance of Plan Einstein implementation building on the existing Plan Einstein ecosystem and the URBACT Local Group (ULG) that operated during the project (see Actions 4.1, 4.2 & 4.3).

Firstly, a **Steering Group** led by the Municipality with key partners will meet every month to reflect on how the implementation of Plan Einstein is going and what should be done differently. This will be the direct follow up of the ULG group.

In addition, a smaller **Innovation Group** involving the project coordinator, ULG coordinator, Senior Advisor on Migration of the City of Utrecht and partners from local universities will seek to review the impact of Plan Einstein approaches and develop and test new approaches for enhancing the overall concept.

Finally, the municipality will also host two **Ecosystem Meetings** per year. These will bring together all the NGOs, associations and other actors engaged in the Plan Einstein ecosystem to reflect together on evolving needs on the ground, approaches that are working well and/or lessons learned along the way.

The **Municipality has overall responsibility** for overseeing implementation of the Plan Einstein approach and for organising each of these governance bodies. But all participants in each formulation are encouraged to freely bring and share ideas, topics and concerns as part of the ecosystem approach.

5.3. Funding strategy

Essential for delivery of the Continuity Plan is the **local authority funding** that has been allocated to the Municipal Plan Einstein programme in Utrecht from 2023. This funding (€2.2 million a year) is allocated to support the implementation of Plan Einstein as local policy and directly **supports the allocation of subsidies and grants to actors in the Plan Einstein ecosystem** for the delivery of spaces and activities for meaningful encounters.

To complement the municipal funding, the City negotiated a key **funding agreement with the national reception agency (COA)**. This was first put in place in 2023 for the period to 2025 and allowed for the creation of the co-housing solution and open, welcoming space at Plan Einstein Pahud. Further negotiations led to the signing of a new agreement in autumn 2025 covering all reception centres in the city for a period of four years (July 2025- July 2029).

On the basis of this agreement, COA pays the City of Utrecht €1,63 per asylum seeker per day to implement Plan Einstein approach across all the refugee locations in the city. With around 1,800 places for the reception of refugees and asylum seekers, this has equated to around €1.1 million a year towards the co-financing of the Plan Einstein programme in Utrecht. This funding is **crucial for funding the new and existing free, open spaces in the reception centres** in the city.

The Plan Einstein location at Herculesplein for Ukranian refugees is paid for separately by the budget of the **national Ukraine programme**. This budget is paid directly from the national government to the municipality of Utrecht who organise it with local NGOs.

Currently, the **budget is in place until summer 2029** from the national reception agency and structural budget of the municipality for the core operation of Plan Einstein spaces and activities linked with the city's reception facilities. Nevertheless, because this budget is now fixed, any efforts to fund new activities will require other activities to be defunded – unless additional funding can be sourced.

For this reason, the City of Utrecht is continually on the look out for **appropriate national or European funding opportunities** to test or scale new and innovative activities that are aligned with the overall Plan Einstein approach. Relevant opportunities are potentially available from URBACT, EUI, ESF, AMIF and other funding programmes relevant to social cohesion in cities.

5.4. Implementation timeline

The new spaces for meaningful encounters were being put in place already during the lifetime of the network and the funding for these physical spaces is in place until summer 2029 through the co-funding agreement with the national reception agency (COA).

The activities for building social networks as well as supporting personal development funded under the 2026 call will start on 1 January 2027 and run for two years until the end of 2028. After that, a new cycle will be planned and delivered.

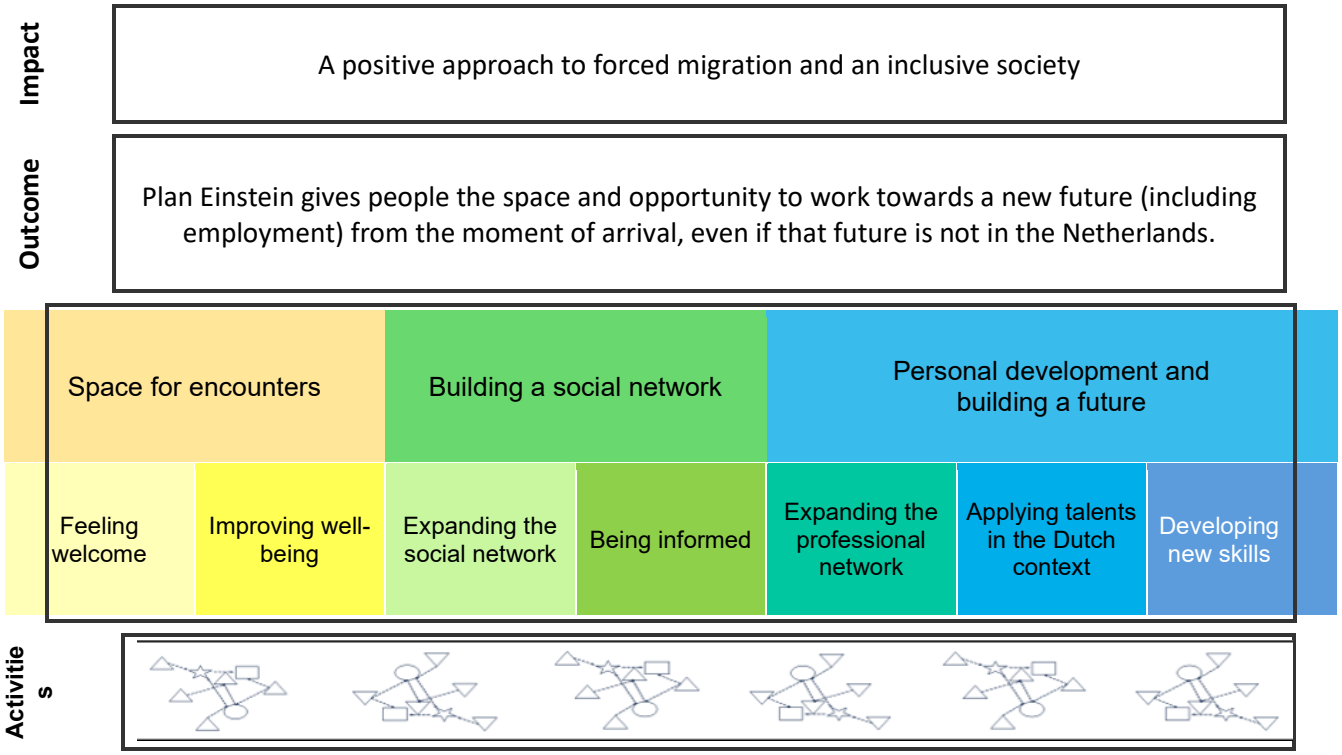
5.5. Regular monitoring framework

Purpose

The purpose of regular monitoring is to gain and provide insight into the extent to which the intended objectives of Plan Einstein are being achieved. The results of the monitoring are used to strengthen the joint approach within the Plan Einstein ecosystem and to make adjustments where necessary. Central questions include: Are we reaching the different target groups sufficiently? Do the activities sufficiently match their needs in terms of content? Where can we work together more effectively within the different focus areas? Finally, this monitoring also provides concrete guidance and criteria for awarding subsidies to Plan Einstein partners.

Focus areas

The monitoring is conducted for seven jointly established focus areas defined in **Utrecht's local Theory of Change**, which *includes the intended impact, the desired outcome, the specific focus areas, and the broad range of activities*



The seven focus areas jointly established for monitoring are thus:

i. 'Feeling welcome'
ii. 'Enhancing well-being'
iii. 'Expanding social networks'
iv. 'Being informed'
v. 'Expanding professional networks'
vi. 'Translating talents to the Dutch context'
vii. 'Developing new skills'.

Data collection

Quantitative and qualitative data are systematically collected by the Plan Einstein partners building on the process put in place during the original UIA project (2016-2019). For each activity, every partner records:

- the **primary focus area to which the activity** belongs (see Table below)
- where and **how often the activity took place**,
- whether there was **collaboration with another Plan Einstein partner**,
- **how many participants** were present.
- **anonymised demographic data**, such as place of residence (reception centre or not), gender and age category - for activities without a registration system (generally characterised by larger numbers) this is typically done on the basis of estimates.

Because anonymisation is required, only data on the number of attendances per activity can be collected. As a result, ***no statements can be made about the number of unique participants***.

Criteria for classifying activities by focus area, with examples

	Focus area	Criterion	Examples
1	Feeling welcome	Open drop-in	Communal living room; coffee gathering; lunch; drop-in evening; party
2	Enhancing well-being	Active participation in activities	Sport; games; dance; music; cooking; mental health; women's activity; gardening
3	Expanding social networks	Encounters with local residents (Utrecht)	Doing creative activities together; cultural activities together; sports together.
4	Being informed	Regarding participation in Dutch (Utrecht) society	Intake; thematic information session; referral; guided tour; specific needs.
5	Expanding professional networks	Encounters to improve access to the labour market	Networking with employers
6	Translating talents to the Dutch context	Specific skills aimed at the Dutch labour market	Dutch language; job application skills; labour-market competencies
7	Developing new skills	Relevant knowledge and skills for the labour market	Digital skills; craftsmanship; English; entrepreneurship

Using the same instrument, partners also collect qualitative information, including participants' feedback on the meaning of the activity and their wishes for improvement or further development. Finally, staff can also record their own observations here.

Analysis

Analysis of the collected data is carried out by the Utrecht University of Applied Sciences. First they clean and harmonise the data – for example supplementing incomplete records, removing duplicates where partners jointly carried out an activity and ensuring that similar activities were classified in the same way to ensure consistency. Then all data are combined by focus area to enable further analysis.

The analysis then focuses on three elements: counting, telling and depicting.

- '**Counting'** comprises quantitative data, such as the number of activities, the number of participants and the proportions of men and women, AZC and city residents, and different age categories;
- '**Telling'** concerns qualitative information, including participants' experiences and feedback on the activities; and
- '**Depicting'** shows what the activities mean to participants, for example through photographs, illustrations or other visual forms.

5.6. Long-term impact assessment

Background

There is considerable interest in the Plan Einstein approach, both nationally and internationally and much anecdotal evidence of success, including the achievement of cross-party political support for the approach in Utrecht and the changing of local sentiment from opposition to support in Plan Einstein locations.

Nevertheless, only a limited amount of formal research (by the University of Oxford) has been carried out to demonstrate and prove the achievement of the intended objectives and this took place relatively soon after the programme began. We can, however, expect that many effects (such as finding paid employment) are likely to become visible only over the longer term.

Previous analyses by the Municipality of Utrecht have already shown that refugees with a residence permit fare less well than the average Utrecht resident in many areas of life. Because of their circumstances, refugees generally also have fewer resources at their disposal (such as support from a social network, language skills and other skills). Plan Einstein is primarily aimed at strengthening these resources. In theory, this should lead to better outcomes in various areas of life, such as employment, income, physical and mental health, and use of care services.

Relationship to previous studies

Researchers in Utrecht have previously conducted research using Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) microdata on socially and psychologically vulnerable residents of Utrecht, focusing on—among others—residents with a migration background, groups from various countries of origin, and refugees; this included adults with mental health issues, children of parents with mental health or addiction problems, and the accumulation of a large number of different risk factors.

This study aims to focus on a sub-group (refugees) of the vulnerable residents studied previously. In principle, it will use the same indicators as the earlier studies (and therefore the same microdata files), but the new element is that we also want to track developments over time.

Research questions and approach

The main research question is:

Do Plan Einstein participants differ from other (comparable) refugees in terms of socioeconomic position and well-being a (to be determined) number of years after participation?

This question can be broken down into sub-questions, based, among other things, on the different indicators we want to use, for example:

- Physical health (based on medication use and/or healthcare costs under the Health Insurance Act (Zvw))
- Mental health (based on medication use and/or mental healthcare treatment under the Health Insurance Act (Zvw))
- Other use of care/support services (Social Support Act (Wmo))
- Source of income and/or receipt of a benefit
- Income (standardised household income)
- Employment (employed/not employed, possibly expressed in FTEs/hours worked)
- Current place of residence

Identifying the study group

We want to answer this question using CBS microdata. We will focus specifically on the approximately 500–600 refugees/refugees with a residence permit who stayed at the temporary asylum seekers' centre on Einsteindreef during 2016–2018. Initially, Plan Einstein was implemented exclusively at this location, and in principle all residents of the centre took part in the programme. After the centre closed, the Plan Einstein approach continued at another (larger) location, but from that point on not all residents of the asylum seekers' centre necessarily made use of the programme's offer.

In theory, the residents of the Einsteindreef asylum seekers' centre can be identified in the data, since during the period 2016–2028 they stayed at a COA location and lived in a specific neighbourhood in Utrecht. Both pieces of information are available in CBS microdata.

Determining a suitable comparison group

We want to compare Plan Einstein participants with other residents of asylum seekers' centres (the control group). In principle, we will look at residents of other COA locations in Utrecht during the same period (2016–2018). This assumes that the Plan Einstein participants do not differ (substantially) in demographic characteristics from the other refugees who stayed in Utrecht. We will first test this assumption. If the Plan Einstein group proves to differ too much from the control group – for example, in age distribution, country of origin or household type – we will adjust the control group (and, if necessary, include residents of asylum seekers' centres outside Utrecht).

Analyses

The analyses will probably consist of a series of cross-tabulations and visualisations showing counts and percentages by group, indicator and year.

Research team and approximate time estimate

We envisage one researcher (with access to the CBS working environment) and one or two formally appointed "observers" who can follow the researcher's work directly during the analyses and advise on substantive questions and/or the technical approach to the analyses. In addition, there will be a substantive "thinking group", including at least Niene Oepkes and Jan Braat, who will refine the research questions based on interim results exported from the CBS environment.

Because keeping the environment open costs money, we want to devote as much time as possible to the analyses within the shortest possible period. However, the data team's other work imposes practical limits on how much time can be spent on one topic each week.

We envisage a three-month research period. The researcher will carry out analyses in the working environment for up to approximately one and a half days per week (two days per week at the beginning, followed by one day per week). Meetings with the thinking group will take place every three weeks, at a minimum. We expect to export the output approximately three times (each export incurs a cost): once or twice to discuss interim results, and then for the final figures.

Privacy considerations

Combining the two pieces of information within the CBS microdata working environment for the 2016-2018 period (the district or neighbourhood where someone lived and the fact that they stayed at a COA location) in effect reveals their address at the time. Nevertheless, because it refers to a residential facility where an estimated 500–600 people stayed during the measurement period, it is not information that can be traced to one or a few individuals.

5.7. Risk identification and mitigation

The key implementation risks identified and explored in Utrecht are:

Risk	Likelihood	Mitigation
Disengagement of local actors	Low - Zero	After 10 years of building the ecosystem approach to Plan Einstein in Utrecht, there is strong engagement of local partners. If any individual body is unable to continue their activities, there are others who can step in and new actors are always encouraged to join in. This is part of the strength of the ecosystem approach.
Political changes at local level	Low - Moderate	Plan Einstein gained support across the political spectrum back in 2019 and continues to enjoy broad cross-party support as it offers 'something for everyone'. This means that the approach is as well protected as possible from changes in local political representation. The results of local elections in March 2026 did not impact this support. Nevertheless, it remains a potential risk in the future and the municipality will continue to celebrate and promote local successes and achievements to maintain broad political support.
Municipal budget cuts	Low - Moderate	Although the overall budget of the municipality is on a downwards trend, so far the budget for the Plan Einstein programme has not been cut. Indeed, in the new programme of the new city government for the next four years, an additional €300.000 per year was reserved for the Plan Einstein programme because of its positive results and because the number of asylum centre places increased from around 800 to around 1,900 in the past 10 years. The need for funding from the municipality is clear and the department will keep making the case that it is an approach that can benefit everyone in the targeted neighbourhoods.
National budget cuts	Moderate	Although the City of Utrecht has a solid contract and working relationship with the National Agency 'COA', there is always a risk that changes in the national government impact support. To a large extent, national decisions are out of the hands of the local authority. However, as long there is a big need in the Netherlands for asylum centres, the national authorities know that Utrecht can deliver with the precondition of Plan Einstein to deliver more positive results and better promote local social inclusion and acceptance.
EU Migration Pact	Moderate	With the new EU Migration Pact, asylum procedures started before 12 June 2026 will take much longer (8-10 years) involving a longer and more uncertain time in an asylum centre. Those who asked for asylum after this date will get their decision much quicker. The potential impacts of the changes in asylum processes can be mitigated already by implementing the Plan Einstein approach to support social networks and personal development 'from day 1'. For both groups of asylum seekers, it will still be important to use their waiting time to develop themselves in the Plan Einstein future-free approach. They can integrate in the Netherlands better or reintegrate in their country of origin with newly acquired skills.